



CONNECTICUT POLICE CHIEFS ASSOCIATION

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Testimony Submitted to the Committee on Labor and Public Employees

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Connecticut police chiefs support Committee Bill 96, *AN ACT CONCERNING TERMINATION WITHOUT CAUSE FOR CERTAIN OFFICERS IN MUNICIPAL POLICE DEPARTMENTS.*

Public safety workers like police officers and firefighters earn public gratitude for braving hazardous conditions and saving lives. When firefighters extinguish a blaze, the fire never complains. But police officers enforcing the law, even when doing so fairly and impartially, may nonetheless incur the resentment of their clients.

A police officer who issues a ticket and hears, "I'll have your badge," needs to know he or she is safe from arbitrary dismissal for taking action to protect the public, even against someone who claims important connections.

Rank-and-file officers are unionized, and their collective-bargaining agreements require due process and a showing of sufficient cause before an officer can be fired. This allows officers to protect the public good without undue fear of retaliatory dismissal.

As management employees, police chiefs lack this union protection. Yet they are subject to even more political pressure than rank-and-file officers, as they are ultimately held to account for each of their officers' actions as well as their own policy decisions. The General Assembly wisely addressed this in ___ by enacting Section 7-278, which requires a good reason—"just cause"—to dismiss the head of a police department.

This section does not provide a free pass to a corrupt or incompetent chief--a number of Connecticut chiefs have been sacked since the law took effect—but it does ensure due process to a chief besieged for doing his job. For example, the law worked as intended last year in East Hampton, where a chief was fired on a blatant pretext after investigating a complaint against his superior, but was ultimately reinstated.

Some departments have one or more executive officers—a deputy chief, assistant chief, or similar rank—who may act as department head in the chief's absence. As management employees, they lack union status, but under current statute they also lack the due process ensured by 7-278.

This anomaly discourages qualified officers from seeking promotion, as there is little incentive to test for a position which means more responsibility but less security.

The committee bill will encourage future leaders in the police profession by applying the "just cause" provision to chief's executive officers. We approve, and hope you will support it.

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